

MR Chairman, Ladies + gentlemen

My name is John W. Bloemendaal. I'm an orthopaedic surgeon practicing in Great Falls in a 10 member orthopaedic group. I have been in practice in Great Falls 40 years and currently I serve on the Benefis board of trustees. I'm here with my colleagues to support the ~~extension~~ of Copa. Currently the Great Falls Clinic and ~~Benefis~~ <sup>is</sup> actively lobbying in the Montana State Legislature to support the extension of Copa.

I can attest to the fact that the face of health care delivery has changed dramatically in the last 10 years since the merger of the hospitals and the inception of Copa.

I am also a member of the IPA which is an independent practice association made up of more than 90 independent physicians in Great Falls and the surrounding communities. It was founded in 1998 with the goal of improving access to quality medical care... We have been hampered in our efforts to allow employees of the County, the City, and the School district to use their services without paying significant financial penalty currently required in part because Benefis is constrained by the Copa. It is critical that Benefis Healthcare be allowed to compete on a level playing field. It is the IPA's goal that all IPA members be allowed to provide medical care to any patient regardless of membership in Montana Care. Montana Care is an insurance product created between the Great Falls Clinic and Blue Cross of Montana to the exclusion of many members of the IPA. Freedom of choice of physicians is critical today to the consumer. Any patient should have freedom of choice and we don't have that in Great Falls. Benefis has been a staunch defender of open panels for all physicians.

~~Benefis Hospital~~ It has come a long way despite the Copa but with the help of philanthropy through the Benefis Foundation it has raised 27 million dollars and has one of the finest up to date surgeries in the Northwest, a first class new Cancer center, a new Peace Hospice, a new emergency and trauma center and has provided many nursing scholarships. It takes all consumers regardless of ability to pay and last year provided 3 millions of dollars in charity care.

Benefis Hospital stands to lose much as the Great Falls Clinic continues to extract the best paying patients and leave the charity work to Benefis. Benefis has gone above and above all requirements set forth in the Copa. It has won numerous awards throughout the country and it is unfair to paralyze a provider this way. We cannot wait any longer for removal of these onerous restrictions that affect only one entity in the entire state and only 2-3 left in the country.

It has served its purpose, the board is diligent effective and dedicated to the community of Great Falls and doesn't need further oversight. Please join others in ~~rescuing~~ the Copa before it is too late for the community.

*sunsetting*

John W. Bloemendaal M.D.

2/5/07